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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to ascertain the relationship between volunteer reading tutors and the reading scores of the tutored students in the primary grades. Two groups of children were studied (N=33), and their progress in reading was observed over a period of six months. One group of children from an urban public school worked with a volunteer group, while the other group from an urban private school had no volunteer tutors. The public school children were tutored by members of the RSVP (Retired Senior Volunteer Program) of Senior Citizens, Inc, participating in the FLIP (Friends Learning in Pairs) program. FLIP tutors worked one-on-one with children in Grades K-3 who would benefit from additional help with their reading and comprehension skills. A FLIP tutor worked with the children for at least one 30-minute session per week, during school hours. Children under study in both schools, limited to second and third graders, were selected by the classroom teachers on the basis of need. Study was also limited to the Accelerated Reader Program, and assessment scores generated by the that program were used. Data were collected with the help of the school librarians and confined to the period from September 1, 2001 to February 28, 2002. Data obtained were interval in nature. An average of the total scores, total number of books read, and the frequency of reading was obtained for the period mentioned above, and these averages were analyzed using a 2-way ANOVA. Gains in reading scores were computed using the STAR scores and analyzed with a 1-way ANOVA. Contains 37 references. (Author/NKA)

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Reading Together: A Study of the Impact of Volunteer Tutoring Programs on the Reading Achievements of Second and Third graders.

by Sharada Sekar

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Reading Together: A Study of the Impact of Volunteer Tutoring Programs on the Reading Achievements of Second and Third Graders

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Presented at the MSERA 2002 Annual Meeting in Chattanooga, November 6, 2002.

Abstract

The purpose of the current study was to ascertain the relationship between reading volunteer tutors and the reading scores of the tutored students in the primary grades. Two groups of children were studied, and their progress in reading observed over a period of six months. One group of children from an urban, public school worked with a volunteer group, while the other group belonging to an urban private school had no volunteer tutors.

The children from the public school were tutored by the members of RSVP (Retired Senior Volunteer Program) of Senior Citizens, Inc., Participating in the FLIP (Friends learning in Pairs) program. FLIP volunteer tutors worked one-on-one with children in grades K-3 who would benefit from additional help with their reading and comprehension skills. A FLIP tutor was assigned to work with the children at least one session per week, during school hours. Each session lasted 30 minutes. Children under study in both schools were selected by the classroom teachers on the basis of need. That is, those children who were seen by the teachers as needing extra assistance in reading were chosen for the study. The study was limited to second and third graders from both schools. The study was also limited to the Accelerated Reader Program, and the assessment scores generated by the AR program were used. The data were collected with the help of the librarians of the two schools for the students selected. The data were confined to the period from September 1, 2001 to February 28, 2002.

The data obtained were interval in nature. An average of the total scores, total number of books read, and the frequency of reading was obtained for the period mentioned above, and these averages were analyzed using a 2-way ANOVA. The gains in reading scores were computed using the STAR scores, and analyzed with a one-way ANOVA.

Introduction and Background of the Study

Volunteers have become an integral part of schools, providing additional support and manpower, and helping staff and students in a variety of ways. There are a number of volunteer organizations active in

Nashville, that are organizing a number of useful programs to mentor children, and also help them perform better academically. Volunteers are useful in many different areas in the school, and provide additional human resources. One of the services provided by volunteers in schools is tutoring. Tutoring has been studied extensively, (Cohen, Kulik & Kulik, 1982; Bloom, 1984;Potter, Blankenship, & Carlsmith, 1999;Wasik, 1997) and continues to be a popular topic of research. Studies (Bloom, 1984;Juel, 1996;Cunningham, 1998;Hubbard & Newell, 1999;Baker, Gersten & Keating, 2000;Moore-Hart & Karabenick, 2000) have generally reported academic gains for tutored students. Researchers also saw effects of tutoring other than academic, including increased self-confidence and self esteem on the part of the students. (Michael, B., 1990)

In 1984, Bloom reported a series of studies comparing the outcomes of different educational methods. The average student exposed to one-to-one tutoring scored about two standard deviations above the average students receiving conventional classroom instruction. Cohen, Kulik , & Kulik (1982), in a meta- analysis of findings from 65 independent evaluations of school tutoring programs, found that most of the programs had positive effects on academic performance and attitudes of tutees and positive effects on tutors. Surveys of tutoring programs have shown that gains were even greater for students when tutors received special training (Michael, 1990).

Experimental studies have shown that students generally showed greater academic progress with tutors than without (Eberwein, Hirst , & Megadanz, 1976;Michael,1990). Researchers who studied a San Francisco immigrant literary project in which volunteers read to and listened to reading by students with limited English skills in grades K-5, concluded that a teacher-volunteer team approach can be effective in enhancing student' attitudes toward and enjoyment of reading and can also improve basic language arts skills. (Michael,1990).

Vygotskian learning theory also provides a basis for understanding why and how volunteer tutoring programs for reading can be effective. Vygotsky (1978) asserted that
"higher psychological processes" such as reading, develop from internalized language, arising first as dialogue between the learner and one or more others in a specific social context, then becoming private speech, used by the learner to enhance and regulate behavior, finally developing to the point of internal, inaudible language or thought (Knapp, 1998).

Vygotsky describes the readiness of a student as the 'Zone of Proximal development'(Vygotsky, 1978; Chemidlin, K.M., 1999). This zone is the difference between a child's independent performance and his performance when he is supported and guided by someone with more knowledge in that area. Vygotsky believes that successful learning is achieved with the support of the efforts of someone with greater knowledge and experience. Tutors support these children, encouraging them to perform difficult tasks within their ' zone of proximal development'.

In the tutoring process, while reading with the children, the tutors provide a scaffolding of the children's reading, working with them to decode words that are difficult, and also providing explanations to clarify the meaning of the text.(Vygotsky, 1978; Knapp, 1998). Such activities provide opportunities for the sort of dialogic thinking that Vygotsky sees as optimal for developing cognitive skills. In reading with the children, encouraging them to read books of their choice, and in giving them the necessary support while they read, enabled the children to work within their individual and ever-changing zone of proximal development defined by Vygotsky as the "learning zone", beyond the level at which a child can perform independently but within which he can operate with assistance from a more knowledgeable other. Knapp, 1998, in recounting her experiences of a reading apprenticeship program she conducted in order to improve the reading skills of her son a first grader, refers to research in social cognition, motivation and information- processing theories which offer support for many elements of the apprenticeship program. According to Knapp, one-on-one tutoring provides a number of benefits. Firstly, the involvement of an older, more skilful reader who derived intrinsic re-inforcement from reading was a classic example of positive modeling. The tutee's sense of self-efficacy in reading was enhanced by the high degree of control he exercised over the entire process, and by his repeated experiences of success in achieving self-chosen goals, i.e., in completing the books. The tutoring experience also has elements that motivation researchers would identify. The reading task, and the child's drive to complete the chosen books, indicates his involvement in a self-chosen, intrinsically motivating task, the availability of cognitive support in the tutor leading to high levels of success for him. In the terminology of an information-processing model, the help provided by the tutors, could be expected to reduce the cognitive load necessary for the tutee to successfully process written text, while lessening the potential for interference from performance anxiety.

Finally, repeated experiences of successful reading of a variety of authentic texts also helps the child develop his reading schemata, his knowledge of written syntax, and his familiarity with story grammars and expository forms (Knapp, 1998).

An increasingly popular area where volunteers have been employed usefully in schools is reading. Parents, senior citizens, and members of volunteer organizations have been actively involved in helping children read better. Reading is one of the most important skills that a child should master, and research (Goodlad, 1984; Juel, 1988; Stanovich, 1986;Reitzammer, 1990) has shown that children who are poor readers in the early grades are more than likely, without intervention, to continue to be poor readers in later grades. Juel (1996) mentions two reasons for this phenomenon. First, children who are struggling with word recognition sometimes become trapped in extremely unproductive hypotheses about how print works. One on one interaction with real time feedback has been seen to be the best method to inform, and eventually alter, these hypotheses. Second, a phenomenon that has been labeled the " Mathew Effect" (Stanovich, 1986; Juel, 1996) can be at work. This means that children who struggle with reading begin to dislike reading, read less both in and out of school, thus losing opportunity to widen their vocabulary, world knowledge, and imaginative ideas.

The purpose of the current study was to ascertain the relationship between reading volunteer tutors and the reading scores of the tutored students in the primary grades.Two groups of children were studied, and their progress in reading observed over a period of six months. One group of children from an urban, public school worked with a volunteer group, while the other group belonging to an urban private school had no volunteer tutors. Research (Michael,1990; Moore-Hart & Karabenick,2000) has shown that evaluation and assessment of volunteer programs are a typical problem area. Hence this study is not an assessment or evaluation. It is more a study of student outcomes in a particular learning environment.

Research Questions

RQ1: Do struggling readers achieve better reading scores engaged in paired reading with volunteers?

RQ2: Do struggling readers read more frequently when engaged in paired reading with volunteers?

RQ3: Do struggling readers achieve improvement in reading when engaged in paired reading with volunteers?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested in this study:

H1: There is no significant difference in the reading improvement between tutored students and the non-tutored students.

1.1 There is no significant difference in the Accelerated Scores between the tutored and non-tutored students.

1.2 There is no significant difference in the frequency of reading of the tutored and non-tutored students.

1.3 There is no significant difference in the number of books read by the tutored and the non-tutored students.

H2: There is no significant improvement in the gains in the reading scores of the tutored and the non-tutored students.

2.1 There is no significant improvement in the gains of the GE (Grade Equivalent) values.

2.2 There is no significant improvement in the gains of the PR (Percentile Rank) values.

2.3 There is no significant improvement in the gains of the NCE (National Curve Equivalent) values.

Methodology

The data were collected in two urban schools, one a public school, and the other a private, Christian school in Metropolitan Nashville.

A total of 33 students from two schools were chosen for the study. Children under study in both schools were selected by the classroom teachers on the basis of need. That is, those children who were seen by the teachers as needing extra assistance in reading were chosen for the study. The study was limited to second and third graders from both schools. The study was limited to the database of AR scores. The students were not directly or personally involved in the study.

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Instrumentation

The Accelerated Reader database was the basis of this research study. The AR program is a computerized program that tests reading comprehension. It provides information regarding the kind and number of books read, and scores received by the students for each test. The AR database was used to collect all the necessary information about the chosen students' reading activities.

Procedure

The data were collected with the help of the librarians of the two schools for the students selected. The data were confined to the period from September 1, 2001 to February 28, 2002.

Data Analysis

The data obtained were interval in nature. An average of the total scores, total number of books read, and the frequency of reading was obtained for the period mentioned above, and these averages were analyzed using a 2-way ANOVA. The gains in reading scores were computed using the STAR scores, and analyzed with a one-way ANOVA.

Statistical Analysis

A two-way ANOVA was done with the two independent variables School ID and Month. The mean of the total scores obtained, the total number of books read, and the frequency of reading for each child, for each month was compared and analyzed.

The results of the ANOVA were as follows:

I. For the dependent variable "Number of books read",
   a. There was a significant difference by school ID
   b. There was no significant difference by month.
   c. There was significant difference by month and school ID together.

II. For the dependent variable, " Frequency of reading",
   a. There was significant difference by school ID.
   b. There was significant difference by month.
   c. There was significant difference by month and school.

III. For the dependent variable "scores",
   a. There was significant difference by school ID

b. There was no significant difference by month

c. There was no significant difference by month and school.

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects
Dependent Variable: No. of books read

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power
Corrected Model	1868.215	11	169.838	7.075	.000	.304	77.823	1.000
Intercept	11033.645	1	11033.645	459.622	.000	.721	459.622	1.000
MONTH	238.523	5	47.705	1.987	.083	.053	9.936	.658
SCHOOL	688.949	1	688.949	28.699	.000	.139	28.699	1.000
MONTH * SCHOOL	859.124	5	171.825	7.158	.000	.167	35.788	.999
Error	4273.053	178	24.006					
Total	17779.000	190						
Corrected Total	6141.268	189						

a Computed using alpha = .05
b R Squared = .304 (Adjusted R Squared = .261)

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects
Dependent Variable: Frequency of reading

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power
Corrected Model	1227.499	11	111.591	14.421	.000	.468	158.629	1.000
Intercept	6381.392	1	6381.392	824.664	.000	.821	824.664	1.000
MONTH	229.860	5	45.972	5.941	.000	.142	29.705	.994
SCHOOL	664.700	1	664.700	85.899	.000	.323	85.899	1.000
MONTH * SCHOOL	299.694	5	59.939	7.746	.000	.177	38.729	.999
Error	1392.871	180	7.738					
Total	9401.000	192						
Corrected Total	2620.370	191						

a Computed using alpha = .05
b R Squared = .468 (Adjusted R Squared = .436)

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects
Dependent Variable: Scores

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power
Corrected Model	14625.925	11	1329.630	3.876	.000	.191	42.637	.998
Intercept	1130965.871	1	1130965.871	3296.982	.000	.948	3296.982	1.000
MONTH	3732.693	5	746.539	2.176	.059	.057	10.882	.705
SCHOOL	10429.917	1	10429.917	30.405	.000	.144	30.405	1.000
MONTH * SCHOOL	542.842	5	108.568	.316	.903	.009	1.582	.129
Error	62088.552	181	343.031					

Total	1233055.000	193	
Corrected Total	76714.477	192	

a Computed using alpha = .05
b R Squared = .191 (Adjusted R Squared = .141)

A one-way ANOVA was done to analyze the gains in GE, PR, and NCE values from STAR 1 to STAR 2.

The following results were obtained:

- There was a significant difference in the mean of the NCE values of the two schools
- There was a significant difference in the mean of the PR values of both schools
- There was significant difference in the mean of the GE values for both schools
- There was significant difference in the mean of the differential values for NCE for both schools
- There was significant difference in the mean of the differential values for PR for both schools
- There was no significant difference in the mean of the differential values for GE for both schools.

ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Differential scores for Grade Equivalent	Between Groups	4.682E-02	1	4.682E-02	.105	.748
	Within Groups	13.814	31	.446		
	Total	13.861	32			
Differential scores for percentile rank	Between Groups	53.658	1	53.658	.150	.701
	Within Groups	11060.221	31	356.781		
	Total	11113.879	32			
Differential scores for Normal Curve Equivalent	Between Groups	16.037	1	16.037	.115	.736
	Within Groups	4304.522	31	138.856		
	Total	4320.559	32			
Grade equivalent 1	Between Groups	10.991	1	10.991	26.777	.000
	Within	12.725	31	.410		

	Groups					
	Total	23.716	32			
Grade equivalent2	Between Groups	9.603	1	9.603	15.100	.001
	Within Groups	19.715	31	.636		
	Total	29.319	32			
percentile rank 1	Between Groups	3120.016	1	3120.016	5.112	.031
	Within Groups	18920.529	31	610.340		
	Total	22040.545	32			
percentile rank 2	Between Groups	2355.348	1	2355.348	3.440	.073
	Within Groups	21227.985	31	684.774		
	Total	23583.333	32			
national curve equivalent 1	Between Groups	1647.404	1	1647.404	5.538	.025
	Within Groups	9222.218	31	297.491		
	Total	10869.622	32			
national curve equivalent 2	Between Groups	1338.364	1	1338.364	4.245	.048
	Within Groups	9774.195	31	315.297		
	Total	11112.559	32			

Discussion

Hypothesis one was rejected, and significance was found for all the three levels of H1. The non-tutored students scored significantly higher in the following categories – The number of books read, the frequency of reading, and scores. The independent variables in the analyses were school ID and month. The months considered were September 2001 – February 2002, both inclusive. Several outcomes were significant by school ID: number of books read, frequency of reading, scores. School 2, which did not have tutors, was on the higher end of the scale of comparison. The only significant outcome by month was for the variable 'frequency of books read'. The results here indicated that the number of books read as well as the frequency of reading was much decreased in December, and consequently, the scores. While significant, this effect was related to the limited number of school days in December and not to the reading programs.

The difference between School 1 (where students worked with tutors) and School 2 (where students did not work with tutors) was considerable. The non-tutored students scored significantly higher than the tutored students.

Hypothesis 2 was rejected . There was significant difference in the PR and NCE values, for the non-tutored students, while there was no significant difference in gains for GE values.

Summary

There was significant difference in the PR and NCE values, for the non-tutored students, while there was no significant difference in gains for GE values. This was a very pertinent find. The GE level of a student lies in his ZPD (Zone of Proximal Development), and is an indicator of the level at which the child can perform independently, with little or no external assistance. That there was no significant difference in the mean of the differential of the GE values of both schools clearly indicates that there was a balancing factor working in school 1 which did affect the shift in the children's ZPD positively.

Research(Cohen, Kulik & Kulik , 1982; Bloom, 1984; Knapp, 1998) has shown that the involvement of an older, knowledgeable reader improved the child's desire to learn, enhanced motivation and a sense of self-efficacy in reading. All these factors may have been at work to some extent in school 1 as indicated by the improved scores in STAR 2.

Research (Cohen, Kulik & Kulik, 1982; Michael, 1990; Wasik & Slavin, 1993; Juel, 1996) has shown that, for tutoring programs to be effective, it must be well structured with the content and delivery of instruction carefully planned and executed. Close coordination with the classroom teacher is another important requisite. Also, the tutoring needs to be consistent and intensive. Wasik (1998) recommends at least 11/2-2 hours per week. Volunteers need to be provided good quality materials to use with the students, and be regular for all the sessions. The tutored group under study had one session a week that lasted 30 minutes. The volunteer tutors did not undergo any formal training nor were they supplied with any specialized materials to use while tutoring. These may be some of the factors related to the lack of significant improvement in reading for stunts from School 1. However, the increase in the GE, PR, and NCE values from STAR 1 to STAR 2 do indicate that something was working.

Suggestions for Future Research

Multiple schools of the similar type should be chosen. In order to evaluate the efficacy of a tutoring program, groups should be pre-tested and post-tested with the aid of established standardized assessment tests. The volunteer program should be well structured, and should spread adequately over the academic year. Accurate evaluation of volunteer programs is very difficult and more research needs to be done in that area. It should involve both qualitative and quantitative studies in order to assess both the academic and affective outcomes, as one is closely related to the other.

This study does not claim to be whole or comprehensive in any respect. It is an attempt to ascertain the relationship between volunteer tutoring and student reading outcomes. The lack of significant difference in the mean of the differential for the GE scores of the two schools does indicate learning was occurring in school one. More research is required in the area of volunteer effectiveness, and the importance of well-structured tutoring programs.

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